Play it Again Herman

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

When I gave Jaws the once over last year I was a bit puzzled as to why Yorkshire-based Alternative Software were so keen to secure a license to a franchise dating back to 1975. One that '90s kids would have been far too young to have experienced when the movie was making waves in the theatres.

Now it all becomes clear; it was released as part of their 'Dad Range', a series of three games targeted towards the proclivities of the typical gamer's *dad*, not the usual yoof market. Rounding off the set was the construction action-puzzler, High Steel (which *isn't* based on a movie, comic book or TV show), and The Munsters (which clearly *is*). Again, many of us would have been too young to have seen the latter first-hand, despite reading all about them later in Tomb and Garden magazine.

That's *one* mystery solved then, though it still doesn't explain why Alternative thought adults would be any more susceptible to lapping up duff games than their naive offspring. Wouldn't they be *more* discerning, not *less*, having endured and filtered several extra years worth of inescapable marketing spiel? Make no mistake, all three titles would have been appreciated about as much as Pennywise the clown at a Coulrophobia support meeting. If you were in the habit of buying games review magazines, you wouldn't have owned any of them.

Alternative's Munsters game was the first title to be published under their 'Again Again' full-price label, apparently an allusion to reverberated '80s pop band names such as Duran Duran, Wet Wet Wet, Talk Talk, and Mr Mister. It was developed by Teque (who would be re-branded as Krisalis Software in 1991) and released in 1989 for the princely sum of £9.99 for the 8-bit version and £19.99 for the 'enhanced' 16-bit incarnation. Either way it was daylight

robbery, minus the customary masks and shotguns. Nonetheless, no less criminal! Teque at least managed to claw back some respectability for their work on Continental Circus and Shadow Warrior. The less said about The Flintstones, Chubby Gristle, or their port of the arcade coin-op, Chase HQ, the better!

Again Again were subsequently responsible for re-publishing Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix by Martech, and Intelligent Design's Crossbow: The Legend of William Tell, replacing the box artwork with that of the 1987 TV series starring Will Lyman. It was already an officially licensed product so why that hadn't already been done is a bit of a conundrum. In the same year The Munsters hit the shelves, Again Again published Gilbert: Escape From Drill and Track Suit Manager, following up the latter with a sequel in 1991. "Oh, goody!", as I believe gentle giant, Herman, would have put it.

The Munsters is a macabre, black and white TV sitcom originally broadcast by CBS, starring a family of ghouls inspired by the classic monster movies that reached the zenith of their acclaim in the '30s and '40s. Backing their production in each case was Universal Studios, which explains why the head of the Munsters household is a blindingly obvious parody of Frankenstein's monster, and no copyright infringement claims were filed against the show.

Congruously, it's homage origins partly allude to the reason The Munsters was downgraded from a colour production to monochrome between the assessment of the unaired pilot, 'My Fair Munster' (featuring two core cast actors who wouldn't be seen again), and the first televised episode,

'Munster Masquerade'. That aside it saved Kayro-Vue Productions $10,000 a segment, ensuring the show was adopted by penny-pinching Universal and CBS.

Like The Addams Family, The Munsters consider themselves a perfectly typical American family unit comprising an infatuated, married mother and father, their son, grandpa and a pet dragon named Spot. Much of the comedy, therefore, derives from their candid interactions with the inhabitants of the outside world, and their understandably horrified reactions to encountering the Munsters.

> Eddie Munster: While Grandpa is taking his nap, would you come down to the dungeon and run some more of his home movies for me?
>
> Herman Munster: Sure, which ones would you like to see, Eddie?
>
> Eddie Munster: Oh, how 'bout the track meet in Transylvania you were in, when you were a young guy?
>
> Herman Munster: Oh, you mean that cross country run?
>
> Eddie Munster: Yeah!
>
> Herman Munster: You know, Eddie, I was so far ahead of the pack, the crowd had to run after me with torches to show me the finish line.

Herman Munster - played by the forever-after typecast, Fred Gwynne - carries a briefcase to work, yet is employed as a mortician by day (all six feet, five inches of him!). In contrast, his doting wife, Lily (played by versatile Hollywood star, Yvonne De Carlo), patiently awaits his return, tending to the home and distributing fresh cobwebs, as would be the norm in 1964 when the show began.

Curiously, the following week in September The Addams Family made its debut appearance on rival network, ABC, sharing a similar premise and themes, albeit being watched by fewer people at the time. So, to answer the question you didn't ask as to which came first, technically it's The Addams Family, having existed as a comic strip dating back as far as the '30s before being transformed into a TV show, cartoon, several movies and computer/pinball games.

> Herman Munster: Lily, just look at this: a hundred and three dollars for electricity!

(the lights go out as he hands her the bill and loud noises emerge from the dungeon)

Lily Munster: Well, you know, Grandpa needs a lot of electricity to carry on his experiments in the dungeon.

Herman Munster: Why can't he have his dungeon in the attic, where there's plenty of light?

Along with their stunningly beautiful, disappointingly *human* teenage niece, Marilyn (named after the famous glamour model and actress), mad scientist, grandpa, and werewolf-vampire son, Eddie, the clan go about their exaggeratedly mundane, totally normal business being nice as pie and generally benign. In total discord with their less than hospitable image, clearly.

In constructing the accompanying game, this is the angle Alternative honed in on to furnish the plot. There's not a whole lot to it so I won't keep you long. 'Old Nick' (aka the devil) has kidnapped Marilyn and sequestered her away in his 'Creepy Chateau' to teach the Munsters a lesson for being such darn decent, upstanding members of society when they're supposed to be terrorising the neighbourhood to uphold monstrous stereotypes.

Lily Munster: Mr Prince, I have to be frank with you. Poor Marilyn is, well, to put it bluntly, less attractive than the rest of the family.

Herman Munster: You might say she's the 'ugly duckling'.

Dick Prince: And you want me to kiss her?

Grandpa: Well, you can close your eyes.

Mirroring the game, the original Marilyn (played by Beverley Owen) was 'kidnapped' by her fiance and whisked off to be 'held hostage' in New York where the reunited couple married. 13 episodes into the first series she was replaced by Pat Priest who ironically looked more like Marilyn than Marilyn (she was blond, while Beverley was brunette and thus wore a wig on screen).

Surprise, surprise, as a model, supportive family, it's your duty to pull together under extreme duress to rescue Marilyn. This entails turning over your house and grounds in search of the 'plain Jane' human afflicted with the lack of a ghastly appearance.

To make the task that bit tougher your tormentor has unleashed a swarm of spectres, vampires, and zombies to invade your abode. Killing these with glowing, trajectory adjustable orbs serves to top up your spell-o-meter flask, allowing you to tackle more fervid bogeymen. Until you do, however, they're invulnerable, rendering you a sitting duck. With your single life and fragile energy supply you're not exactly a force to be reckoned with from the outset so this really doesn't help your cause. This being the case it's recommended you don't leave the bedroom-set first screen until you've defeated sufficient numbers of low ranking fiends to maximise the potency of your spells. Welcome to grinding, Munster style! We may be here some time.

> "Even after collecting objects it was frustrating taking on the bigger beasts. Sometimes they only barely touched Lily to drain all her energy away. And with only one life per game, I was going back to the beginning with frustrating regularity. The price tag seems excessive for what's on offer... Mediocre graphics, an unoriginal plot and overly frustrating gameplay. RIP."
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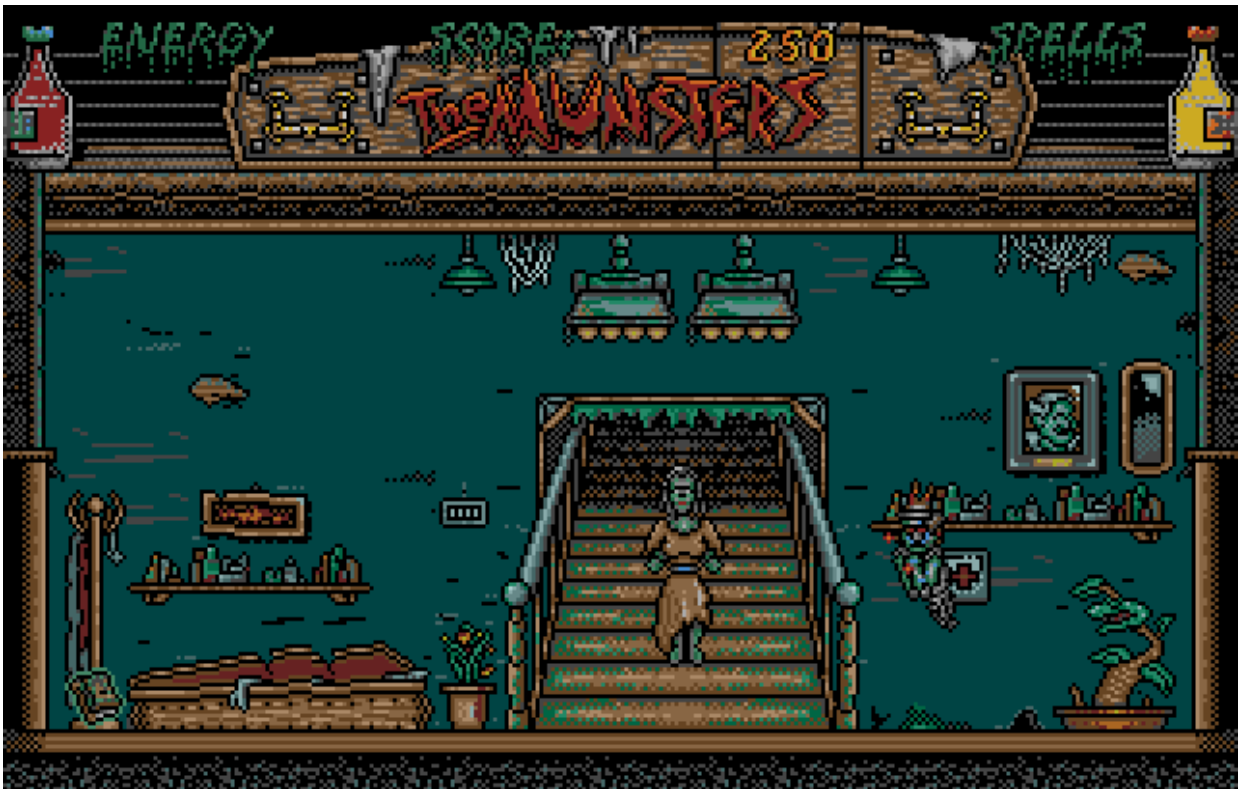
> **41% - The One (Atari ST version, March 1989)**



Even at full strength, you'll want to give Dracula a wide berth as he's immune to your gimmicky defences, whilst other members of the undead can't be dispatched without first acquiring the relevant magic household object such as a cross, spellbook, potion bottle and, erm... a screw? Establishing which is associated with each creature appears to be random pot luck, so really the only effective strategy is to grab everything, and if it doesn't do the trick, leg it! "Horribly good software" indeed.

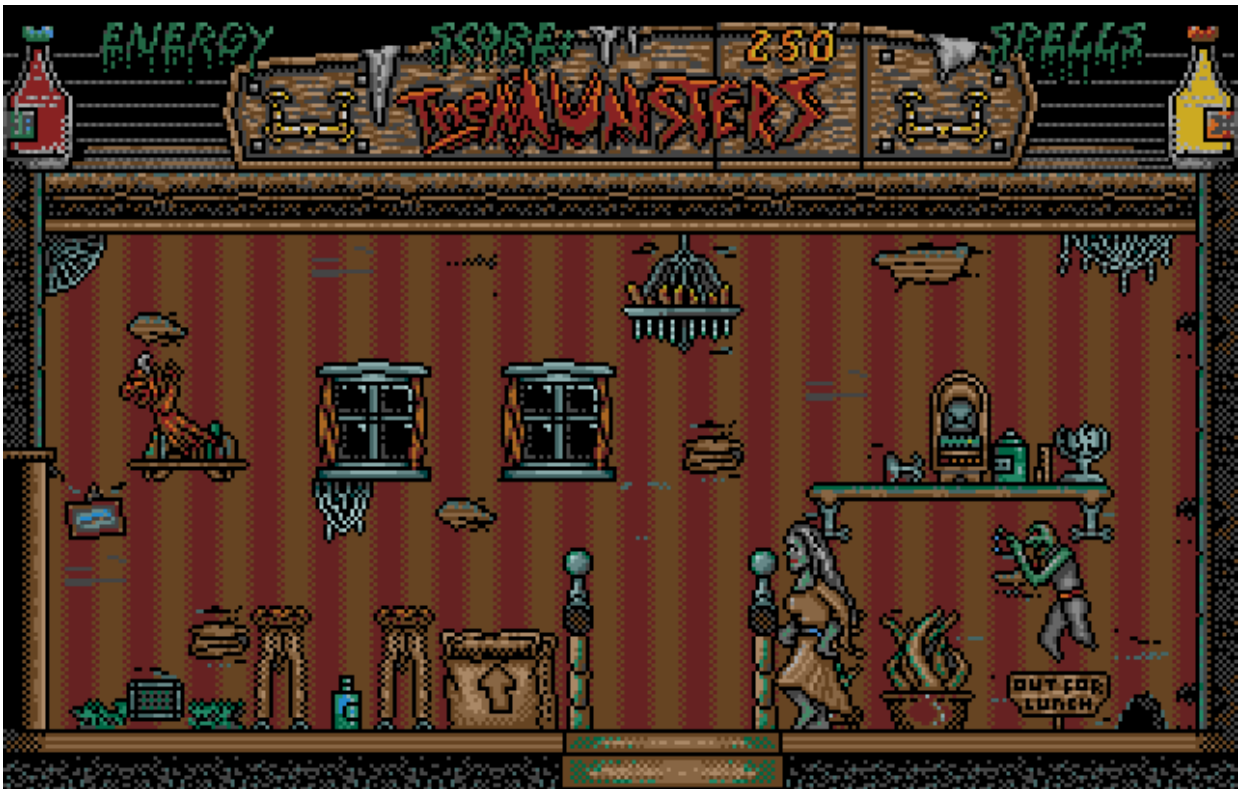
Ready for battle, you venture further into your mansion and grounds one Atari ST-ported flip-screen at a time, initially taking the role of housewife, Lily.

Totally seamless trivia segue ahoy: Lily was originally 'Phoebe' in the unaired pilot and was played by another actress, Joan Marshall. Joan was replaced by Yvonne De Carlo because her persona and appearance was deemed too similar to that of Addams Family's Morticia. Apparently CBS were concerned over the potential for accusations of plagiarism so insisted the role be recast and tweaked to distinguish Lily from ABC's matriarch.

Our first task is to find hubby, Herman, and Grandpa, tagging them both into the melee. Grandpa (aka the Count of Transylvania) as played by Al Lewis later went on to parody his Munsters and Super Scary Saturday roles in Gremlins II where he donned his Grandpa outfit to host a similarly spooktacular, graveyard shift 'creature feature' show. Is there any chance we can just do Munsters trivia and skip the game? *Please*? Thought not.

"Here is my main criticism of the game. Getting through level one is neither easy nor quick, so having battled through to level two I think it reasonable to be given the choice of restarting the game at that level when killed. Otherwise frustration at plodding through the same repetitive screens will almost inevitably set in. Except for that annoying point I would have rated the game higher, but the Munsters was nonetheless challenging, great fun and well put together."

70% - Atari ST User (April 1989)



Switching to Gramps mode we continuing to explore the catacombs with Herman now trailing behind like the world's biggest and dopiest puppy. Attesting to his vampire credentials, Grandpa automatically transforms into a bat, soaring off through his infested home sweet home, up to the attic and out into the bleak night sky through an open window. Now in charge of Herman, our objective is to stomp through the chapel situated deep within the bowels of his dilapidated mansion at 1313 Mockingbird Lane (*doubly* unlucky for some!) to establish the whereabouts of wolf-vampire hybrid, Eddie, who then joins the party.

In the show's pilot Eddie was played by Nate 'Happy' Derman, however, the producers, unimpressed with his bratty, mean-spirited portrayal decided to recast his part. Butch Patrick took the baton, lending the character an endearing, cheeky chappy disposition. Conversely, in the game Eddie was played by a collection of animated, coloured

pixels. He was at no point substituted for a *different* set of pixels.

Herman Munster: (recounting the dynamite incident) And then there was this terrible explosion, and the next thing

> I knew I was lying in the gutter three blocks away, and Spot was licking my face.
>
> Eddie Munster: Then what did you do?
>
> Herman Munster: We took a taxi home. Eh, of course, when we got here, I made Spot give it back to the driver.

About ten minutes into the game, with that little diversion taken care of, it's onto the penultimate level where we now find ourselves controlling Eddie's pet dragon.

> "Fred and I designed Spot. We were the ones who decided the family needed a pet. Fred's a great artist so we got together and came up with Spot. The prop department built him for us. What does Butch remember. He was twelve." - Al Lewis

Spot is the size of the Munsters' family vehicle, which is fortunate because we're tasked with protecting the hot-rod/hearse 'Munster Koach' composite (built by George Barris who also designed the Batmobile) from a horde of gargoyles, zombies, werewolves, witches and other grisly threats to the family's well-being as we forge ahead under the illumination of a full moon to emancipate Marilyn. This is achieved either by shooting them with our fireballs, or lifting the car off the road out of harm's way.

> "The game designers obviously spent little time looking at the TV series before opting for a walking (and later, flying) shoot-'em-up with minor arcade adventure elements - little in the game, other than its title and music, reminds you of the fun characters. Slim sprites bear only slight resemblance to their screen originals and humour is non-existent, so no atmosphere is generated. The simple gameplay may appeal to some, so if possible, try before you buy."
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> **57% - The Games Machine (Atari ST version, February 1989)**

Reaching Marilyn's castle prison we must guess which of a series of four sets of doors she is stowed away behind. Any incorrect choices made result in the release of an angry hellion who we must vanquish (by hurling weaponised industrial strength bolts) before they can bury us six feet under. It's just like the Generation Game, only with deadly consequences, and no Bruce Forsyth (RIP) to chivvy us along with his chirpy banter. And that's it, mission accomplished, game over, thanks for playing. This pretty much sums up the finale's congratulations message, which Alternative put far more effort into drawing than they did researching and creating the rest of the game leading up to this point. With so little scope for replayability, intuition tells me you won't be

playing this Again Again, or even just *Again*. Echoey down here amongst the tombs isn't it?

> "As you've probably guessed, I wasn't all that keen on The Munsters. The standard of programming almost reaches average, but there seems to have been very little thought put into the game design. I would baulk at spending ten quid on the Spectrum version, but would faint at shelling out twenty of my favourite coins for an ST version which is little better. Not a game I would recommend, even to Munsters fans."
>
> **27% - Computer & Video Games (Atari ST version, February 1989)**

Ben Dalglish's brilliant rendition of the theme tune is the refulgent jewel in the cracker prize crown, though even that soon wears thin, being the only music available on the jukebox. On a constant loop in fact. Sadly it's not nearly enough to mitigate the tediously slow, jerky and monotonous

gameplay, accentuated by the throttled release of your orb projectiles and button-mashing levelling up mechanic.

Given the developers involved - despite the token effort inclusion of a poster and iron-on t-shirt transfer - The Munsters was always destined to be only a headstone's throw away from the bargain bin. Even at *that* price point you'd be better off blowing the dust off your rapidly disintegrating Betamax tapes instead. It's culture clash comedy at its finest, and with 70 original episodes, a revamped TV series - 'Munsters Today' - contributing an additional 72 episodes, and 5 spin-off movies, there's plenty to keep you amused. You could *even* treat yourself to a remastered Blu-ray box set; the Munsters *always* felt more at home in a box! As for the game, Herman would be rolling in his grave... if the caretaker could keep him *in* it long enough!